

VZCZCXRO4680

OO RUEHAG RUEHDA RUEHDF RUEHFL RUEHIK RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHLN RUEHLZ  
RUEHROV RUEHSR RUEHVK RUEHYG  
DE RUEHFR #2006/01 0871903  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
O 281903Z MAR 06  
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5682  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHMRE/AMCONSUL MARSEILLE 1083  
RUEHSR/AMCONSUL STRASBOURG 0083  
RUEHC/DEPARTMENT OF LABOR WASHDC  
RUCPDO/DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RUEATRS/DEPARTMENT OF TREASURY WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 002006

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT ALSO FOR EUR/WE, DRL/IL, INR/EUC, EUR/ERA, EUR/PPD,  
AND EB  
DEPT OF COMMERCE FOR ITA  
DEPT OF LABOR FOR ILAB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [CASC](#) [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [EU](#) [FR](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#)

SUBJECT: MARCH 28 PROTESTS SIZEABLE -- ORGANIZERS VOW  
CONTINUATION -- REPORTS OF ARRESTS IN PARIS

REF: A. (A) EMBASSY PARIS DAILY REPORT FOR MARCH 28 AND

PREVIOUS

[1](#)B. (B) PARIS 1967

[1](#)C. (C) EMBASSY PARIS DAILY REPORT FOR MARCH 17

[1](#)D. (D) EMBASSY PARIS DAILY REPORT FOR MARCH 8

PARIS 00002006 001.2 OF 002

SUMMARY

-----  
[1](#)1. (U) As of 1900 hours Paris time on March 28, preliminary police reports cite a turn-out for today's (ref A) nationwide demonstrations of over a million, double that recorded during previous protests against the Villepin government's First Employment Contract (CPE). Earlier in the day, Prime Minister de Villepin reiterated his refusal to withdraw the CPE, but also renewed his offer to "ameliorate" certain of the more controversial clauses of the youth employment reform law. Outside of Paris, there were no reports of significant violence during demonstrations and protest marches that, in most cases, took place during late morning and early afternoon. The march in Paris, which began in mid-afternoon, was marred by one clash between hooligans and police at the beginning of the march. Later in the afternoon, dozens of hooligans were arrested as plainclothes police tried to prevent muggings and robberies of demonstrators. As of early evening, the site of the end of the Paris march, the Place de la Republique in eastern Paris remains tense as hooligans challenge riot police amid the dispersing demonstrators. END SUMMARY.

SIZEABLE NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS NATIONWIDE

-----  
[1](#)2. (U) Preliminary police reports cite 1,055,000 as the number of anti-CPE protesters who took to the streets today, in the fourth iteration of nationwide protests against the Villepin government's youth employment labor reform, the First Employment Contract (CPE) (ref A). Organizers claim that 3 million participated nationwide. The police figures are double those reported for the demonstrations on March 18, the largest anti-CPE protests (ref C) until today's. (Comment: The success of today's protests is certain to encourage the student, labor, and political organizations behind the campaign to persist in demanding a full withdrawal of the controversial labor reform. End Comment).

## VILLEPIN STANDS HIS GROUND

---

13. (U) Earlier today, Prime Minister de Villepin reiterated his refusal to withdraw the CPE, but also renewed his offer to "ameliorate" the most contested clauses of his controversial youth employment reform law. "The unions have refused my outstretched hand," Villepin said during a mid-afternoon speech in the National Assembly. "If they would like to reduce the two year trial period, and if they want (the employer to provide) a reason for firing the employee, then I am open to those discussions." (Note: The response of organized labor, as articulated by Francois Chereque, head of the moderate CFDT trade union federation is, "We're not interested in negotiating the details of allowing employers to fire without cause -- that's the fundamental change in the relationship between employer and employee that we object to". End note.)

## PROTEST LEADERS PROMISE TO PURSUE THEIR SUCCESS

---

14. (U) Referring to today's large turnout, Bernard Thibault, leader of the once communist CGT trade union federation said, "It is unimaginable that the prime minister is sticking to his position. For us, there is only one answer -- withdrawal of the CPE law." Jean-Claude Mailly, leader of the militant FO trade union federation, was even more confident, saying, "Unless Villepin announces the withdrawal of the CPE law tonight, I will call for another day of strikes." Judging that the student led-movement had yet to reach its peak, Bruno Julliard, leader of the UNEF student union, predicted that the protest movement would continue to grow to "tidal wave" proportions. Representatives of the numerous student, labor, and political organizations that are leading the protests will meet tomorrow afternoon (March 29) march to review today's events and discuss next steps.

PARIS 00002006 002.2 OF 002

## PARIS INCONVENIENCED, BUT NO MORE, DESPITE SIZEABLE PARTICIPATION IN STRIKES

---

15. (U) Most of Paris' transportation networks appeared to be functioning better than expected, with buses, trams, subways and commuter trains operating at almost 70 percent of capacity, as opposed to the 50 percent predicted. Even so, today's transportation strike affected at least 70 cities and towns throughout France, including Paris. According to preliminary estimates from the Education Ministry, about 40 percent of high school teachers walked off the job nationwide (more than the prior March 7, 2006 strike against the CPE (ref D), but less than the January 20, 2005 strike against the education reforms proposed by then-Education Minister Francois Fillon). For the first time since the anti-CPE strikes began in early February, there appeared to be significant participation among employees from the parastatal companies (essentially the telephone, gas and electric utilities, and the post office). A significant turnout was also reported for private sector banks, steel companies and telecoms, although no official figures were provided.

## MINOR INCIDENTS OF HOOLIGAN VIOLENCE -- SO FAR

---

16. (U) Nationwide, there have been no reports of major violence. However, as the Paris demonstration got underway in the early afternoon, there was a brief altercation between some one hundred masked youths ("casseurs" (ref B)) and security personnel affiliated with the trade unions. The hooded hooligans then attempted to attack a supermarket, but were rebuffed when the manager closed the heavy metal gates. Undaunted, they then shattered the windows of the cafe next-door before riot police intervened and hauled many of them away.

## ARRESTS AND TENSION AT END POINT OF PARIS MARCH

----- --  
17. (U) As today's march in Paris winds down (1900 local time), and demonstrators disperse from its end point at the Place de la Republique in eastern Paris, there are reports -- televised live -- of gangs of hooligans assaulting and robbing demonstrators and challenging riot police. Approximately 100 hooligans fled authorities after attacking demonstrators and stealing cell phones, cameras, and bags. Several dozen arrests were reported, many by plain-clothes police patrolling among the demonstrators. Many shops and business around the Place de la Republique are closed and shuttered for fear of vandalism and looting by hooligans after nightfall.

Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.cfm>

Stapleton